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April 7, 1977

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Honorable Robert C. Hill
American Ambassador
American Embassy
Buenos Aires

~~Department of State, A/GIS/PS/ERP~~
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Dear Mr. Ambassador:

The purpose of this letter is to report on Patt Derian's conversations where Embassy officers were not present, as well as give you a few of my own impressions.

Our lunch with Robert Cox at the American Club was just perfect. Patt discussed Jimmy Carter the man, and his life-long dedication to human rights. I think Cox recognized that the Administration's dedication to basic rights is a very genuine, long-range commitment. Patt gave him a signed copy of the President's United Nations' Address. (Other copies went to Muller of the UNHCR, Timmerman of La Opinion, Mrs. Justo of the Permanent Assembly and the Nuncio. I think a sixth would have gone to Mr. Jenner of the Red Cross had one been available.)

Cox described the horrors of the Peronist era, leftist terrorism and the present-day situation. There was nothing new in this although Cox is very articulate. A few specific points:

- Solari Irigoyen's offense to the Armed Forces came in 1972 when he publicly criticized the Trelaw Prison killings in the aftermath of Santucho's escape to Chile.

- Gustavo Roca was contemptible because he had published a newspaper or magazine exalting leftist violence.

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- Christopher Roper is a Marxist businessman.
- There is no way to confirm whether crematories exist in Cordoba. It is the kind of horror story that has a certain pornographic quality that people pass around as the truth.
- Perhaps the most dangerous of the hard-line generals is Suarez Mason. (On the other hand, Neustadt spoke well of Suarez; perhaps because they are neighbors.)
- The American Embassy has performed well on the human rights issue.

Our session with the Permanent Assembly was undoubtedly the most passionate exposition of the human rights picture which we experienced. Ninety-year-old plus Alicia Moreau de Justo spoke with great dignity, lucidity and, indeed, fire. She characterized the human rights situation as barbaric. She described an incident which took place on March 16. Armed men invaded a home at night where an elderly grandmother, a mother and young daughter lived. Two young men were visiting at the time. These thugs broke into the house, ransacked it, stealing at will, and took everyone with them except the older woman. The prisoners were blindfolded. At an unknown place of detention, the mother was beaten with rubber truncheons. She could hear her daughter's screams in a nearby room. Finally, the mother was released at an unknown spot (she had been blindfolded throughout her ordeal) and she made her way home. To this day, she is desperately trying to locate her daughter, who, to her knowledge, is guilty of no subversive activity.

Labor leader Bravo then told the story of a family that with much trouble was able to recover the body of a daughter who died in prison in Cordoba. An autopsy later revealed that two live rats had been sewn into the girl's vagina and had torn her body apart as they tried to get out.

Mr. Pimentel discussed the problem of habeas corpus petitions and the intimidation of the press in connection with the publication of the writs. The La Opinion reporter who covered the courts was kidnapped; other papers simply ignore the subject. Pimentel described

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how the Assembly tries to document disappearances, largely through families that inform the Assembly of what is happening.

The Westerkampfers (he teaches physics) described the conditions of their son's detention at Sierra Chica: a crowded cell, confinement 23 out of 24 hours, and no reading material. They did note that the food improved slightly after a Red Cross visit.

Finally, Emilio Mignone told us of his daughter Monica's disappearance and his conviction that the Navy is holding her.

We left this meeting subdued and went to the Canadian Residence. We were briefed on the refugee "sit-in" at the Canadian Embassy and Canada's efforts on behalf of the refugees. Patt briefed the Ambassador on the Administration's human rights commitment and determination to do something about the pandemic spread of repression in the world. He told us that he was leaving the next day for a meeting of Canadian Ambassadors to be held in Mexico City. Human rights was to be on the agenda and, the Ambassador continued, this conversation would be very helpful to him in Mexico. He stated that Canada had not pressed Argentina on the human rights issue but that as a result of our conversation, there might be a change. The Ambassador also mentioned that a bomb had been discovered in an automobile very near his Residence, possibly meant for him. Our meeting with the Canadians was very pleasant.

On Saturday morning I had breakfast with Bernardo Neustadt. He will be spending his week in Washington as Orfila's house guest. I promised to try to arrange an appointment with Todman, and noted that Patt looked forward to meeting him in Washington. Neustadt claimed that Videla had ordered an accounting of all prisoners in detention and that a list would be published by May. He stated that the Army Command was holding strategy sessions on waging the peace. He felt he would be able to report on positive developments during his visit to the United States. (I seem to have heard this before.) He was very disturbed by the disappearance of Edgardo Sajon, saying that he had heard it might be related to

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the Graiver bankruptcy case. Neustadt was troubled that the government might now be making secret economic arrests in addition to political ones.

Our other meetings have, of course, been recorded in Memoranda of Conversation. While we were able to review several of these in Buenos Aires, I look forward to going over these memos in more contemplative circumstances.

What came across most clearly to me is the continuing hope that nearly everyone we spoke to places in Videla. People - at least most of our contacts - do not blame him for the seemingly uncontrollable activities of the goon squads. The Navy seems to operate secretly in an effort to polarize the Army. It would appear that some of the military and leftist extremists are doing all they can to provoke a civil war. Timmerman fears that his newspaper will be closed in some kind of Reichstag incident, signaling a hard-line triumph. He declared that the Montoneros would eventually win a civil war if one took place. He, therefore, welcomed the Carter Administration's efforts, including the military credits reduction, because it had finally stiffened the moderates and given them the courage to face up to the hard liners. The business community, Timmerman suggested, is at long last afraid of what the United States might do in the economic arena and is, therefore, backing the moderate cause.

Our sessions with the Foreign Ministry were almost beside the point. Arlia seemed in another world. I really sympathize for those on your staff who deal with this Alice in Wonderland character.

I guess we must continue judging events in Argentina with extreme caution and hope that we will take every opportunity we can find to nurse whatever forces of moderation exist in that tragic society.

My very best.

Sincerely,

Fernando E. Rondon

Concurrence: D/HA - Ms. Derian (in draft)

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Box 2

Argentina